

**WE
NEED
TO
SAY
SOMETHING**

Let's do it!



COMMUNICATING CULTURE & MESSAGE @ *Sandy* ASSEMBLY OF GOD

Connect Groups present a unique opportunity to communicate important messages about who we are, what we're all about, and how we ought to both engage with and respond to scripture. It's important to recognize that they also present a tremendous responsibility.

Whoa. That sounds big. *What if we don't do it well? What if we get it wrong?*

We don't want that to happen, so this week is all about how to do well at communicating culture and message through Connect Groups.

Week 3 Training

Communicating



**Culture
&
Message**



Before we get into this, a warmup...

By this point in our training, you've been hearing a lot about our mission, vision, and values. They are actually a really big deal to us. Each component of our mission, vision, and values is biblically grounded and provides an apt summary for the culture by which we believe healthy churches can be characterized. We really do believe that healthy churches are made of healthy people who excel in every one of these key areas, so let's take a moment to review what they are:

Mission

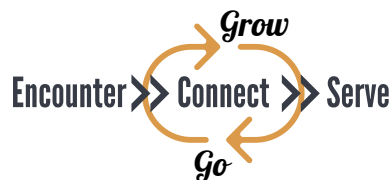
*Reach
the Lost*



*Disciple
the Found*

Vision

*That everyone who calls Sandy
Assembly of God home would
regularly and intentionally:*



ENCOUNTER God
CONNECT with others
SERVE in ministry
GO tell the world
GROW through it all

Values

HEALTHY CHURCHES
 ARE MADE OF HEALTHY PEOPLE.
 IN ALL WE DO, WE MUST BE:

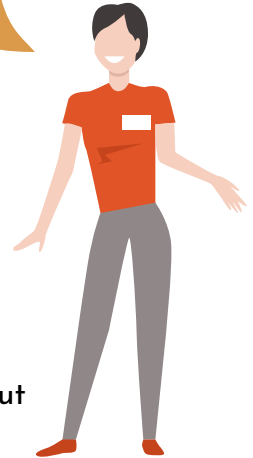
- 01 Spirit-Empowered
- 02 Bible-Engaged
- 03 Gospel-Focused

If you think you could use a detailed explanation of what each of these elements of our mission, vision, and values are, be sure to check out Pastor Joel's Vision 2022 sermon series, preached from January 2 to March 20, 2022. They are all available at Sandy Assembly of God's YouTube channel, Facebook page, and Vimeo account.



Let us sound like we're making a sales pitch for a moment...

YOU HAVE AN OPPORTUNITY!

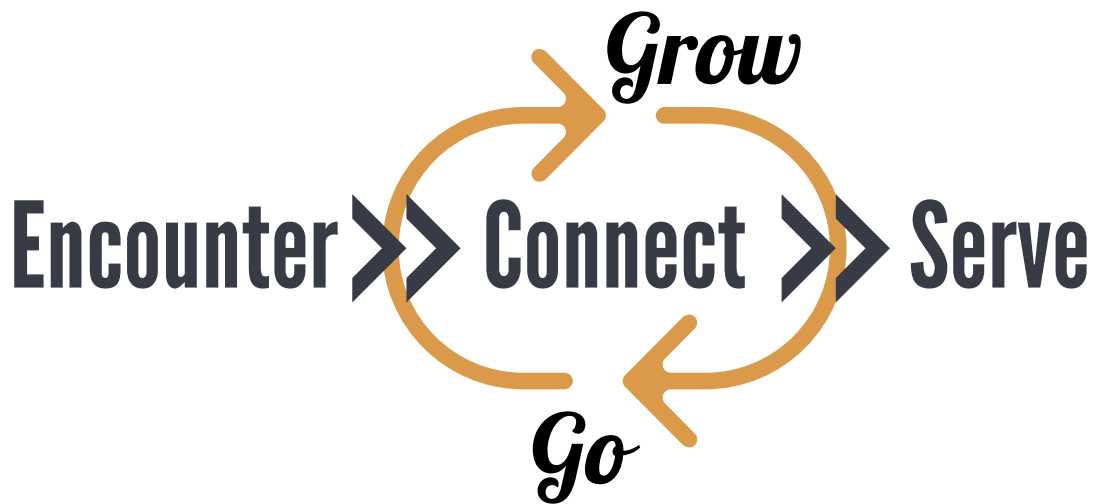


You sure do!

Connect Groups are an opportunity to communicate the very same mission, vision, and values we've been talking about.

We can help people grow in spiritual maturity as those who participate in our Sandy Assembly of God community carry out our mission and walk through the five stages of our vision in Spirit empowerment and Bible engagement with a focus on the gospel.

Remember, it's all a process, and we really believe this process leads to the healthy discipleship necessary to make for healthy believers and a healthy church.



Okay, okay! I've heard enough about this mission, vision, and values. Can we get on with training on how to do this?



First Things First: Unity Matters, and so does Intentionality

If you haven't figured it out by now, your pastor and his team are taking a very intentional approach to, well, pretty much everything right now.

It's true.

Everything (and we really do mean *everything*) we do is running through the filter of our mission, vision, and values. We ask these questions when we set out to do anything:

Mission → Does this help us reach the lost or disciple the found?

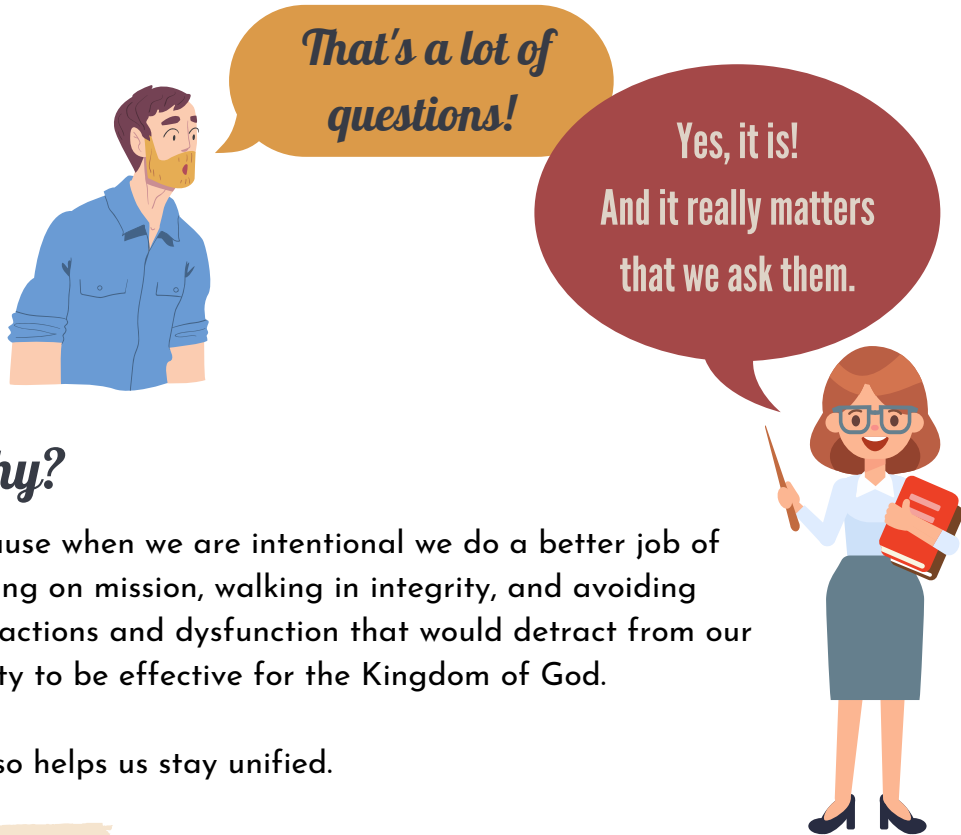
Vision {
Does this help people encounter God? Or connect with others?
Does it give someone an opportunity to serve in ministry?
Does it lead anyone to go tell the good news of the gospel?
Does it lead to spiritual growth?

Values * Are we depending on Spirit empowerment? Is there anything we're doing that is evidence we're leaning on our own power? If we're doing all we believe God has called us to do, what else might He do to complete all He wants to accomplish? Are we dreaming big enough? Are our thoughts or actions limiting God? How much more might God want to accomplish? How will we respond when His will is accomplished?

More values *

Is this grounded in scripture? Does scripture compel us to do it? Is it theologically sound? Is what we're doing reflective of Bible engagement or leading people to engage with the Bible?

Are our priorities right? Are we focused on making sure what we do points people to the gospel? Does it in any way compromise or appear to compromise our most important message, the gospel? Does this advance the Kingdom of God?



Why?

Because when we are intentional we do a better job of staying on mission, walking in integrity, and avoiding distractions and dysfunction that would detract from our ability to be effective for the Kingdom of God.

It also helps us stay unified.

Yes, unified.

We are one Body composed of many members, right? (1 Corinthians 12:12-27.) And if all the members of the Body focus around accomplishing a unified goal through this kind of intentionality, who knows what could happen? What could God do with that kind of unity?

God cares a lot about unity too.

Remember what Jesus prayed in John 17:20-23? That the believers would be unified so that the world may believe in Him.



Let's think about how all this applies to Connect Groups...

Questions for reflection:

How can I create an environment for my Connect Group meeting site that reflects our mission, vision, and values?

How can my tone when I communicate, whether through written or spoken communication, reflect our mission, vision, and values?

How might who I invite to be in my Connect Group reflect our mission, vision, and values?

What are some of the things a Connect Group leader or member might do that would count as a deviation from the intended mission, vision, and values?

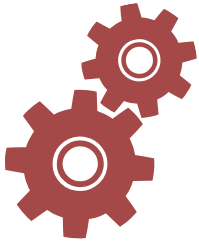
What kind of damage might it cause if the message I communicate through my actions or words deviates from the intended mission, vision, and values?

What kind of response might I give someone if they ask why it matters that we be intentional and unified in our approach to Connect Groups?



What if I or someone else have a question about these things that I don't feel I can properly answer?

Ask! We are happy to talk with you about any concerns you may have. We don't need speculation or assumptions clouding our ability to walk in unity.



Let's switch gears...

Everything we've just covered could easily be considered:



Communication of Culture

We're going to spend the rest of this week on what we're going to call:



Communication of Message

We can send a lot of messages, and how we communicate culture is a way of communicating a message. Let's get very specific though: right now we're talking about communicating the message of the weekly Connect Group Bible lessons as a Discussion Guide (*those people who lead discussions in Connect Groups*).



Give me a crash course on guiding a discussion.

You got it!



The Basics of Communicating a Message:

1

Be prepared.

Do your homework! This doesn't mean you know all the answers, but it does mean you have a plan.



Do the weekly Bible Engagement Project devotions.



Make sure you're familiar with the format of the recommended Bible Engagement Project group lessons.



Ask these questions about the lesson you're about to go through as a group:

- What passage of scripture will we be discussing?
- What is the main idea/theme/objective?
- What is your call to action?
- What activities do I want to use?
- What resources and items will I need?
- Am I evaluating my plan before my small group time?



Connect with a pastor if you see something right off that you don't understand. (Connect with them after a weekly Connect Group meeting if you or your group weren't sure about something.)



If you're thinking of applying to be a Discussion Guide, what is a time/place which you can set aside for Connect Group preparation?

2

Understand your role as a Discussion Guide.

Being a Discussion Guide isn't the same as being a teacher, though the process of guiding a discussion does work to communicate a message. Your Connect Group members should be learning a lot as they engage with scripture and each other. This means it doesn't require you being an expert on scripture or theology. No seminary education required!

Instead, please bring a heart sensitive to the leading of the Holy Spirit, a loving and listening attitude, and the willingness to step out and provide an opportunity for your group to engage with the Bible together.



If you've seen discussions facilitated well, what things do you recall about what the facilitator did that were particularly memorable or helpful?

3

Lead through the awkward moments.

Don't abandon now, but it's true: awkward moments are going to happen. Sorry! So we're going to take a few minutes to examine the kinds of challenges you might face. (*Warning: they all have to do with people because...well...your Connect Group is all about people.*)

- **The Conversation Dominator:** Never discourage people from participating. Instead have a private conversation encouraging them to help you involve others in discussion.
- **The Shy Small Group:** Silence is not always bad; sometimes people need time to process. Consider using open-ended questions or even pairing people for discussion as an alternative to a large group discussion.
- **The Over-sharer:** Always thank people for their contribution. This effectively validates them. Then guide those in your small group to respond either with prayer or examining the scripture. A private conversation may also be necessary as you seek to pastor that individual.
- **The Challenger:** Be careful not to escalate an authority confrontation. Remind everyone that we are to build one another in discussion. Let them know you would be happy to have a conversation with them at another time to address the concern they raised. Consider bringing a pastor into that conversation.



Remember you are not alone! Your pastoral team is there to support you as a small group leader.



Have you ever led or been a part of a small group before wherein you encountered some of these challenges? How did you or the leader respond? Was the response positive or negative? How could the response have been improved?

4

Close it well.

We've all been there. Maybe you're starting to think it now..."*When is this thing gonna end?*"

Some people avoid stepping out and leading precisely because they're afraid people will think that. (*Don't you do that now!*)




But here's the thing: even if something goes a little rough, when it ends well people will walk away saying, "*Now wasn't that wonderful!*"

Don't get us wrong. We're not doing this so people will think we're great. We just want *your Connect Group* experience to be great! We want Connect Groups to be something people want to come to because we believe God wants to do some amazing things through Connect Groups.

The good news?

By following these few tips, you're likely to have a great ending!

Here's how:

-  Stay on topic throughout the meeting. This means you won't feel rushed or like you didn't have time to finish when it comes time for the end.
-  Be a respecter of time *throughout the time* your Connect Group meets. Start on time (or pretty close -- we know people are building relationships. These *are* "Connect Groups" after all!), follow those above tips for dealing with awkward moments, and keep your eye on the clock. People have places to be, whether it's getting to work on time in the morning, back to work after a lunch-time meeting, home to relieve a babysitter, or into bed. End as close to time as you can, and your Connect Group members will feel more able to keep coming as a part of their weekly routine.
-  Stay sensitive to the Holy Spirit. You never know what He's going to want to do, and nothing's better than when He gets to do what He wants to do! Make space for the Holy Spirit by opening in prayer as a group, continuing an internal dialogue with the Lord as you guide discussion throughout your meeting time, and by providing prayer times and quiet time at the end (or any other time you sense the Holy Spirit prompting you to do so).

Don't be afraid to lead your group in prayer as a response to needs that arise. Likewise, don't forget to ask others to lead out in prayer. This is an opportunity for your group members to all grow in their confidence as servants in ministry.

Finally, don't be surprised if the Holy Spirit has plans that are different than yours. His ways are higher than ours, after all! (Isaiah 55:8-9.)



How do you plan to incorporate prayer into the routine of your small group?

Have you experienced the gifts of the Holy Spirit? How might you make space for the Holy Spirit to empower people with His gifts during your Connect Group meetings?

Phew! That was a lot of training. Hopefully you're feeling a little more comfortable with the idea of communicating culture & message. We trust God will continue to help you as you step out to serve in faith.



Connect Group Training Schedule

Wednesdays at 7 pm

Week 1, March 16: A Vision & A Plan to Get There

Week 2, March 23: Using Bible Engagement Project

 Week 3, March 30: Communication of Culture & Message

Week 4, April 6: Practical Group Dynamics

Week 5, April 13: Commissioning Service

Week after Easter, April 18-24: Connect Groups Launch!

Mark your calendar!

Keep practicing with Bible Engagement Project...

*See you back
next week!*

In the meantime, let us know if you have any questions

Email:

Pastor Joel Morris | joel@sandyassembly.church

Pastor Larry Topliff | larry@sandyassembly.church

Or call the church office: 503.668.5589

